

RI Senate Hearing Testimony: Opposition to Senate Bills 2787 and 2784

Speaker: Julie Maruska

Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee, my name is Julie Maruska. I am a **veteran** educator at The Compass School, a Rhode Island **parent**, and was honored as a Rhode Island STEAM **Educator of the Year** in 2024. I am here to **urge** you to **oppose** Senate Bills 2787 and 2784.

We **all** care about the achievement of Rhode Island's children, and the research is clear: **the single most important factor in a child's academic growth is the quality of their teachers**. Therefore, if we prioritize students, we **must** prioritize the **retention of effective educators**.

Currently, we face the highest teacher turnover in 50 years. Surprisingly, research shows that salary is not the primary driver of this exodus - **school culture is**. Teachers **stay** when they have collaboration, autonomy, and trust. These are the **exact attributes** upon which Rhode Island's charter public schools are built.

I speak from experience as a Harvard-educated teacher whose students have **consistently** outperformed state science averages. By all accounts I'm an "effective, high-quality teacher." However, if I had stayed in the district public schools where I taught, **I would have left the profession a decade ago**.

In that setting, I found a culture of micromanagement and bureaucracy where my **flexibility and trust** was **exploited** and my **collaborative, problem-solving nature** was **discouraged** rather than utilized. I stayed in teaching only because I found a **charter** public school that offered the culture of professional trust and shared leadership I needed to thrive.

By opposing these bills, you are **protecting** the schools that are **built on and model** the **culture** necessary to **keep effective educators in the classroom**. In a time of national crisis in teacher retention, we should be **scaling** these successful models, **not restricting** them.

Please **protect our students** by **protecting our teachers** through your **opposition** of Senate Bills 2787 and 2784.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

If you are reading the written version of this testimony, you may find some of my additional advocacy materials attached.

[Boston Globe OpEd published February 23, 2026](#)

[Prior written testimony in opposition to HB 7415, the House version of S2787, authored March 9, 2026](#)

COMMENTARY

To retain R.I. teachers, we need schools where educators can thrive

The charter public schools where I have been fortunate to teach offer autonomy and have a culture of genuine respect, writes science teacher

By **Julie Maruska** Updated February 23, 2026, 5:55 a.m.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Many would say teaching is more than a job — it's a calling. The best teachers help students learn, develop lifelong skills, and shape their futures. It takes a village. But in many instances, that village is lacking. Without the right conditions, [teachers burn out and leave](#).

I've taught in both district and [charter public schools](#), and I know that feeling well. What ultimately convinced me to stay wasn't just passion — it was finding the conditions that allowed me to sustain it. As Rhode Island works to [recruit and retain](#) educators, we need to confront that reality.

I didn't always dream of being a teacher. In college, a dog bite scared me out of a

career in veterinary medicine that I'd been planning since the second grade. So it was a surprise even to me when I decided to try teaching.

I joined [Teach For America](#) and moved to Phoenix to teach middle school science. It was life-changing — and the most challenging work I've ever done.

I almost quit during my first month. I cried every day during my prep period and pulled myself together just in time for the next class. Of course, some of that struggle came from inexperience, but much of it came from a system that made teaching harder than it needed to be: [limited supplies](#), unstable infrastructure, and a culture lacking trust and transparency.

I completed my two-year commitment with noteworthy student academic outcomes and relationships, as well as a deep respect for the teaching profession. Despite these successes, I felt a persistent tug toward the medical field, driven by a problematic societal narrative that someone with my history of academic prowess was destined for “something more” than a career in teaching. But day after day, I was bored. I began realizing I found no boredom in teaching and, in fact, I was deeply motivated to make a difference for kids.

At [Neighborhood House Charter School](#) in Dorchester, Mass., teaching finally became my true calling. I spent the next five years in a career that I loved, growing personally and professionally, backed by a culture of trust, respect, and support. My students made strong academic gains and I was awarded for my teaching. I sat on the planning committee for the opening of the high school, represented our school at community-wide events, and led an initiative to integrate scientific writing in K-8 classrooms. My voice and skills had a meaningful impact on shaping the future of the school.

When life brought my family to [Rhode Island](#), I joined one of the largest district public middle schools filled with talented educators who loved kids, teaching, and were inspired to make a difference; but I was experiencing a familiar, sinking feeling. I found myself frustrated by a bureaucratic school culture characterized by mistrust, micromanagement, and red tape.

Refusing to give up, I tried to become part of the solution. I advocated for changes that would support teachers — including reducing planning burdens for new educators — but repeatedly encountered resistance, even when I offered to help. Ultimately, I got tired of “no” and resigned. I felt discouraged by the lack of flexibility and unwillingness to collaborate, but what ultimately stayed with me most was the silence — no one fought for me to stay. I couldn’t remain in a place that didn’t recognize or value my worth.

Years later, the stars aligned when I was offered a science teaching position at The Compass School, a charter public school in my neighborhood where my daughter would also be able to attend kindergarten. At Compass, my love for teaching was rekindled. I found a village of educators who trust one another, collaborate on solutions, and say “yes” to thoughtful ideas. Here, flexibility replaces rigidity, and teachers are enabled to problem-solve rather than navigate red tape. I feel empowered, heard, and trusted. And not a day goes by when I am bored.

This is not a story about good versus bad schools or specific types of institutions, it’s about conditions for success. The [charter public schools](#) where I have been fortunate to teach offer autonomy and have leaders who are proving what is truly needed: administrators who exhibit trust and transparency, decision-making that is collaborative, and a culture of genuine respect for educators’ expertise. Those

conditions allow educators to teach well, grow professionally, and thrive in the classroom.

If we want to attract and retain talented educators — and ensure students receive the education they deserve — we should focus on what we know works, and work together to create those conditions everywhere.

Julie Maruska, a science teacher at The Compass School, was recognized as the 2024 Rhode Island Elementary STEAM Educator of the Year. She holds a master's degree in Learning and Teaching from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Written Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 7415, the House version of S2787

To: House Education Committee

From: Julie Maruska, Charter School Educator and Parent at [The Compass School](#)

Date: March 9, 2026

Subject: Oppose HB 7415 – Protecting Innovation and Quality in RI Public Education

Dear Chairperson, Members of the Committee, and other interested parties,

I am writing as both a veteran educator and a Rhode Island parent to urge you to **oppose House Bill 7415**. My career has spanned both district and charter public schools, and it is my experience within the charter sector that has kept me in the classroom. At a time when teacher retention is a national crisis, we should be protecting the school communities that empower and support educators, rather than restricting them.

I oppose this bill for the following critical reasons:

1. Charters are hubs of innovation and teacher retention.

Charter public schools serve as vital laboratories for innovation. Because of our increased autonomy and reduced "red tape," we can creatively solve problems and pilot new academic content or developmental approaches that can then be shared with the broader educational community. This environment of professional trust is why I, and many of my colleagues, have remained in this field. I urge you to read [my recently published Op Ed in the Boston Globe](#) to further elaborate my points. If you don't have time, here is the AI overview:

Science teacher Julie Maruska argues that retaining Rhode Island's educators requires shifting from bureaucratic micromanagement to school cultures built on autonomy, trust, and professional respect, which she has experienced most significantly in charter public schools. She advocates for flexible, teacher-centered environments that prevent burnout and allow both educators and students to thrive.

2. Charters allow for agility in academic practices such as literacy.

In my former role as a director at [New England Basecamp](#), a RI educational non profit, I saw firsthand the variations in how schools implemented the **Right to Read Act**. I discovered that my daughter's assigned district public school was not yet using the research-backed phonics approach essential for her development. In contrast, Compass teachers quickly bought in, received training, and were held accountable for these science-of-reading practices because they worked in a strong professional culture characterized by trust, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Luckily, my daughter was accepted to Compass and benefited from these best practices in literacy instruction. Every family deserves access to a public school that can adapt this quickly to meet their child's needs.

3. Charter approvals and expansions are already based on merit and accountability.

Rhode Island already has a rigorous system of accountability. Successful schools—like Compass, with its award-winning environmental sustainability efforts—are allowed to expand because they are outpacing their sending districts academically.

- **Merit-Based Growth:** We should continue to grant renewals and expansions based on proven success.
- **Accountability:** Underperforming schools in the charter sector are held to strict standards and face closure if they do not meet them. This is a model of accountability that ensures public funds follow quality results. I only wish the same could be said for public district schools.

4. Charters allow teachers and students to stay in the public school system.

Charter schools are public schools. Families who are unhappy with their current district options should not be forced to leave the public system entirely. HB 7415 limits the very opportunities that keep families and talented educators here in Rhode Island's public school system.

Conclusion

For the sake of our educators, our families, and—most importantly—our students, I ask you to maintain the current, merit-based authorizing process. Please **oppose House Bill 7415** and continue to support high-quality public school options for all.

Respectfully,

Julie Maruska
jmaruska@compassschool.org
Educator, The Compass School